

GRASSROOTS ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION IN SOUTH STUKELY, QUEBEC

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ABSTRACT

This article studies the conditions in which the decision-making process for the implantation of a second pipeline in the South Stukely corridor took place. The authors observe how the residents of South Stukely, in their fight to be heard and to conserve their land and its various ecosystems, went from being powerless in front of governments and corporations who imposed upon them the widening of the corridor for the installation of a second pipeline running through their private land, to creating a community-based, not-for-profit organization devoted to promoting the conservation of nature on private lands. The evolution of the Association de Conservation de la Nature de Stukely-Sud from a coalition of residents to a pro-active incorporated group is an example of a changing mentality in Quebec, where residents seek more active involvement in the making of decisions that will affect their daily lives.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article présente les conditions dans lesquelles la décision d'implanter un second gazoduc dans le corridor artificiel de Stukely-Sud a eu lieu. Les auteurs font état du cheminement des résidents qui, tout en luttant pour préserver leur territoire et les divers écosystèmes qui s'y trouvent, se sont assemblés pour faire face aux gouvernements et aux corporations qui ont imposé sur ces individus l'élargissement du corridor dans le but d'installer le gazoduc sur leurs terrains privés. Malgré leur défaite, les résidents ont quand même su prendre l'initiative de créer un organisme communautaire à but non-lucratif se consacrant à la préservation de la nature sur les terrains privés. La lente évolution de l'Association de Conservation de la Nature de Stukely-Sud témoigne de la mentalité changeante des Québécois, qui veulent de plus en plus être impliqués dans des processus décisionnels qui affecteront leur vie quotidienne.

Introduction

This article was written jointly by a resident of South Stukely and a researcher from Bishop's University who share a common interest in environmental stewardship and in the understanding of the relationship between people and their living environment. Combining perspectives, the two have described and interpreted this story of a community's struggle to have its voice heard by government and industry, and its ability to organize itself, to study its options, and to offer creative solutions toward social and environmental sustainability. The story of grassroots environmental action in South Stukely is not over, as decisions about the community's future are still to be determined. Nonetheless, it is told now, in mid-stream, precisely because it is a *history in the making* which speaks of a community's creative determination to protect its natural environment and rural quality of life – something that is cherished throughout the Eastern Townships.

South Stukely: A Quiet Village

The village of South Stukely is located just west of Mount Orford, between Eastman and Waterloo. It has a storied past with French and English agricultural settlement dating back to the early 1800s. A few buildings, including homes and churches, display the valued architectural vestiges of the area's pioneering past. The village is located on the *Chemin de la Diligence* (Stagecoach Road), what was once the main stagecoach trail between Montreal and New England. This trail is of recognized heritage value and is one of the most picturesque routes in southern Quebec. As the decades have passed, the changing cultural and economic dynamics, including the new Autoroute 10 which by-passed the village and the development of neighbouring cities, South Stukely retained its relatively unspoiled rural atmosphere and agricultural character. Fewer than 1000 people now reside in South Stukely, dispersed in homesteads throughout the rural municipality.

In an economic sense, South Stukely could be considered an underprivileged setting. Unemployment rates are high, and a large proportion of residents receive welfare assistance. The last working dairy farm in the municipality ceased operations in 2005. The only industries are a quarry and a precision metal operation. The service sector is almost undeveloped, and residents must go to neighboring towns for everything from groceries to medical services. According to the *Politique de la ruralité*, the development index is -1.78 (the

lowest in the territory of the regional municipal government - *municipalité régionale de comté*, or MRC - of Memphremagog), while the social and material index of disadvantage is in the lowest quintile. This economic climate makes the municipality vulnerable to development initiatives that may not always be in the best interests of the residents or the natural environment.

Today, a 100-meter wide swath, a treeless corridor, is visible on the rolling landscape running parallel to the *Chemin de la Diligence* for more than six kilometres - the entire length of the municipality. The wide corridor transects two dozen private lands along its path fragmenting fields and forests, and in doing so, affects land use, wildlife habitat, aesthetic value and quality of life. The corridor is made up of an electrical transmission line (installed in 1947 by Southern Canada Power), a local distribution natural gas pipeline (installed in 1983), and a second pipeline (installed in 1998) intended solely to export natural gas to the United States (Figure 1). The widening of the corridor to make room for the second pipeline has been the focus of much controversy in recent years, and as a result has changed the quiet community forever.



Figure 1: The triple-utility corridor in South Stukely

The Second Pipeline: A Pitched Battle

Early in 1996, a series of public meetings were called in municipalities across the Eastern Townships by Trans Quebec & Maritimes Pipeline Inc. (TQM) to present the possibility of a second pipeline to deliver natural gas to New Hampshire and Maine. The initial route was to go through the town of Bedford, further to the west, where a pipeline that was going out of service would be used. Some months later, however, the decision to construct an entirely new pipeline, and the announcement by the National Energy Board¹ that it would be conducting hearings over the new pipeline, caused significant alarm to residents living along the proposed route. Concerned residents quickly formed an informal coalition to pool information and develop a response strategy. Nodes of opposition formed along the 217 km pipeline route in sensitive areas, including in South Stukely, along Route 55 near Bunker Hill and Ayers' Cliff, and in East Hereford. Through letters and telephone calls, the coalition of residents was effective in convincing the provincial environmental hearings office (*Bureau d'audiences publiques sur l'environnement* or BAPE) to be called into session. For probably the first time in the lives of most of the residents involved, they had become part of a large political process that would determine their collective future.

Following weeks of public hearings, the BAPE report agreed in part with the residents that there were unanswered questions about the choice of proposed route, among other significant irregularities, forcing the National Energy Board to call a second round of public hearings. Meanwhile, construction plans were proceeding forward and TQM land assessors were given the go-ahead to begin compensation negotiations with landowners along the proposed route. One elderly English-speaking couple whose land was being considered for the new pipeline was approached by the land assessor and intimidated into signing the compensation agreement. The couple was told they might face legal action if they did not sign the agreement. Fearing the worse, the couple signed the agreement, only later to regret it. Within days, other local landowners were being approached by the TQM assessor and informed that their neighbours had signed. They were told the pipeline was going to be built anyway, and they had no recourse but to sign if they wanted any compensation at all. Second-home residents living in Montreal and other places were also targeted to destabilize the permanent residents. A climate of distrust and rumours began to pit neighbour against neighbour in South Stukely, and confusion reigned in the

community even though the public hearings had given the impression of transparency and openness.

In order to participate in the second round of the hearings process, the coalition of residents was required to suggest an alternative route. This put them at a disadvantage against the construction engineers, since the locals had insufficient expertise to adequately make such judgements, nor the finances to hire an expert that could. They opted for what seemed best to them and proposed that the pipeline be installed along Autoroute 10, which, they observed, already had a pipeline along some of its route. Being rushed for time, and feeling completely overpowered by the energy giants and governments, the coalition found one expert who agreed to act as an expert witness for them at the hearings. However, to the residents' horror, the expert began his testimony by praising the TQM's work, and offered only a weak and ambiguous suggestion for an alternate route.

The regional municipal government was not in favour of the coalition's alternate proposal either. Opposition also came from those residents in the MRC whose land stood to be affected by the new proposal. The argument was made that tourism in the MRC would be negatively impacted if Autoroute 10 were marred by a pipeline next to it. Though this logic appeared faulty to the coalition, the matter of an alternate route was never pursued further by the project proponents.

What made matters more difficult for the coalition to comprehend was the fact that despite the pipeline proponents' insistence at all the hearings that the proposed pipeline route must be as straightforward as possible and follow almost exclusively existing energy servitudes to reduce costs and environmental damages, the proposed route was suddenly changed at the last minute without warning or explanation. The new proposed route would now make a 90° turn, just beyond the eastern boundaries of South Stukely, avoiding the western flank of Mont Orford², and crossing under Autoroute 10, through the tiny municipalities of St-Étienne-de-Bolton and part of Eastman. Affected landowners of these municipalities, having been targeted at the very last minute, had no time to prepare a defence and subsequently were at a great disadvantage at the public hearings.

Adding insult to injury, South Stukely residents discovered at the public hearings that their municipality's officials, who had stated publicly their opposition to the route, had been negotiating with TQM officials to develop a bicycle path along the new proposed

pipeline corridor. These negotiations had occurred without any consultation with landowners. Landowners who stood to be directly impacted by the additional pipeline, located mere metres from their homes for some residents, were now faced with the prospect of additional intrusions by myriads of cycling tourists in the summers, as well as the possibility of more unwelcome hunters, snowmobilers and all-terrain vehicle enthusiasts. It is important to note that although the pipeline is owned and managed by the pipeline company, the land in which it is buried is still owned by the individual residents.

Immediately after the second round of public hearings, the National Energy Board made the decision to allow the construction of the pipeline exactly as originally proposed through South Stukely, and the members of the coalition were expropriated. Construction on their properties began in September 1997.

Post-Construction Reflections and Events

Residents in South Stukely were left with an unfavourable impression of the hearing process and governments at all levels. Further, the coalition members were excoriated in the media as people only concerned about their own interests, and suffering from the NIMBY syndrome³. Local residents had spent more than two years in a fight that appeared fixed in favour of the pipeline company from the onset, making the battle essentially unwinnable. The only ray of comfort for some of the landowners was an environmental contract they had signed with TQM. The environmental contract specifies that joint action was to be taken by the three energy companies, Hydro-Quebec, TQM and GazMet, to manage the triple-utility corridor and sets out specific ecological restoration measures to be taken, particularly in wetlands, and to take measures to prevent intruders from using the open corridor.

Ultimately, the environmental contract was never complied with. The engineering company that built the pipeline went bankrupt, and blamed the landowners for the rising costs associated with the delays.⁴ TQM has since been bought out by Calgary-based Trans-Canada Pipelines Inc., and the pipeline has consistently been under-utilized mainly because of rising costs of natural gas which has decreased demand in the United States. These repercussions have put into question the need for the pipeline in the first place.

The Ice Storm of 1998 also served to remind residents of the government's ability to justify the construction of more energy corridors on private lands without public input of any kind, when

the *Hertel-des-Cantons* hydro line was built in a neighbouring area. One local resident was told that there would be another pipeline built in the area within five years to meet rising energy needs. Then, in July 1999, violent winds uprooted trees along the open corridor and into the adjoining woods. The energy corridor had served as a wind tunnel that compounded the wind action and caused severe damage to healthy trees on the edges which might not have been impacted had the corridor not been widened.

Over the following years, residents observed that motorized trespassers using the corridor for recreational purposes, and accessing the forests by the corridor, had been increasing since the installation of the second pipeline. They observed that the quantity of waste left in the corridor and in the forest (*i.e.* beer bottles, shotgun shells, oil cans, human excrement) had increased and there was significant damage to the natural environment caused by tire treads on the sensitive soils. Noise disturbance also increased as did damage to property fences and property signs.

Following these events, the residents concluded that the wide corridor was a significant liability to their community and way of life. They decided to look for pro-active solutions that might turn the liability into an asset.

A Vision for Nature Conservation is Crafted

The coalition of residents in South Stukely began holding kitchen meetings to discuss avenues to legally protect the natural environment on their properties. Observing the growing seasonal-recreational development in the MRC of Memphremagog which had caused fragmentation of large tracts of forests and wetlands and a loss of habitat for wildlife, they decided to explore programs to enhance wildlife habitat on their lands – a wildlife corridor.

They began to formulate arguments for conservation and sought resolutions of support from the municipality and the MRC for the idea of a wildlife corridor. All the briefs and presentations landowners had brought before the NEB and the BAPE had spoken of the fragile local environment, the pressures for residential and tourism development in the Townships, the already scarred landscape. They focused on the cumulative impact of the many uncoordinated development initiatives which reduced habitat. One of the most compelling arguments was the damage to the natural environment resulting from the post-construction use of the wide corridor by unauthorized recreational vehicles and hunters. This was not just the problem of the affected landowners, but a problem for

the municipality and for the region. This argument proved to be convincing and the idea of nature conservation on private lands in South Stukely began to take root.

Gradual Progress toward a Strategy

As the South Stukely group investigated various strategies which would help toward implementing its vision, it enlisted the help of numerous local people already working in the field of environmental conservation. These included Stewart Hopps of the *Memphremagog Wetlands Foundation*; Terri Monahan of the *Appalachian Corridor*; Jean-Guy Dépôt of the *Conseil Régional de l'Environnement*; Darren Bardati, professor of Environmental Studies and Geography at *Bishop's University*; among others. Information was sought from various levels of government about conservation programs, as well as the *Nature Conservancy* about the mechanics of making a land gift for the purpose of perpetual conservation. As time progressed, a few small studies were initiated to explore the feasibility of various conservation options.

In 2001, upon learning about the Quebec government's new law promoting the establishment of nature reserves on private lands (*Loi sur la conservation du patrimoine naturel, L.R.Q., chapitre C-61.01*), the coalition of residents decided to set up a meeting with a biologist from the regional branch of the Ministry of Environment. He provided examples of all the existing mechanisms of protecting private lands. These included outright gifts of land, servitudes, planned gifts, legacies, and many others. The idea of conservation gathered momentum as the biologist assured landowners that the large area in question and relative lack of exploitation provided a promising potential for conservation.

Soon after, the coalition of residents approached a resident of the community who had previously spoken to a former mayor about protecting a small private lake on her family's property. The logic, for the coalition, was that if a few landowners took the initiative to legally protect their lands, in one form or another, then others would follow suit and thereby expand the zone of nature conservation in the South Stukely area.

In the fall of 2002, two geography students and a biology student from Bishop's University were commissioned, as part of their undergraduate research projects, to investigate, by telephone survey, the attitudes of landowners along the corridor regarding the prospect for wildlife conservation on their private lands. Their study, submitted in January 2003, concluded that the majority of South

Stukely landowners were generally in favour of the idea, though more details of the exact implications would need to be forthcoming.

In December 2002, the issue of corridor edge habitat became the focus of attention⁵. The coalition of residents presented a proposal to the municipality explaining the role of edge habitat created by the pipeline with a plan to develop a wildlife corridor that would provide a linkage between habitat parcels for wildlife of all kinds, allowing animals to move from one habitat area to another more easily, and more safely. With the decrease in the amount of large parcels of untouched land, such linkages will become increasingly important in wildlife conservation in the future. The councillor in charge of the environment was supportive of the project, but felt that the timetable was too short, and that certain aspects were not sufficiently developed. The coalition therefore invested more time into obtaining resources and expertise to assist them.

In January 2003, the coalition invited Pierre Aquin, the civil servant of the Quebec Ministry of Environment (MENV) responsible for the natural reserve program, to present information on the new law. The mayor of South Stukely and twenty-five key residents attended. The natural reserve program allows owners themselves to request the MENV to recognize their land as protected because of the presence of an endangered species, a special geological feature, a unique habitat, or otherwise valuable ecosystem component. M. Aquin pointed out that the energy corridor was considered damaged ecologically and could not be considered, by itself, as an ecologically sensitive area. For the government to consider the conservation project, more land adjacent to the corridor would have to be added. An additional condition stipulated that the new protected lands would be held under conservation agreement for at least 25 years. Discussion ensued around the limitations of landowners in their use of the lands and financial compensation for the potential loss of use of their land through a conservation scheme. At the end of the meeting, the civil servant urged the residents to set up a formal association to legitimize their vision and to continue to explore ways of achieving the goal of protecting the area of the servitudes, and this idea was endorsed by the mayor of South Stukely.

Following the advice of the government official, a nature committee (*Comité de la nature*) was formed with an executive of seven members. It included one community (non-corridor) member and one non-resident corridor member and aimed to pursue the goal

of protecting land in South Stukely. Over the next months, the goals and objectives of the conservation project were reworked and formalized. The committee had moved past the narrow vision of protecting the energy corridor to a more comprehensive community-based nature conservation project.

During the summer of 2003, Bishop's professor Darren Bardati and Cedric Bourgeois, a graduate student at the *Université de Sherbrooke*, conducted a study to assess possible hindrances to the vision of conservation as perceived by those who might be affected. They conducted personal interviews with every landowner along the pipeline corridor, each of the government officials in the municipality, the MRC and in Quebec who held the conservation portfolio, as well as the pipeline company representatives. They concluded that five hindrances impeded the vision's progress, including: ill-defined goals; limited community cohesiveness; inadequate communication between all parties; lack of trust; and limited institutional flexibility (Bourgeois and Bardati, 2004). They presented their findings in November 2003 to the community of South Stukely at a town hall meeting. These results served to refine the nature committee's strategy even further.

In May 2004, the nature committee was formally incorporated as a not-for-profit organization called the *Association de Conservation de la Nature de Stukely-Sud (ACNSS)*. This would enable it to apply for government for funding, and to apply for charitable status. This status would enable the association to seek donations, and to itself hold conservation servitudes. Consequently, applications for funding grants were written and submitted to the municipal government, the MRC's *Pacte Rural* program, and Environment Canada's EcoAction program.

The Association received its first funding in July 2005 and began work on a strategic ecological inventory, to be carried out by *Appalachian Corridor (ACA)*, with which it became formally affiliated. Two more studies are currently underway. A survey of the ecologically-sensitive management aspects of the energy servitudes has been completed by a recent graduate of Bishop's University, Mike Grandbois. Another study aimed at identifying species of interest on the corridor and immediately adjacent to it, and suggesting actions to be taken to protect and improve habitat for these species is being conducted by Jeff MacDonald, another Bishop's graduate who worked on the original study in the fall of 2002. With these studies underway, ACNSS is gathering vital information about the natural environment in order to produce a

viable conservation plan.

The Way Forward

In the past few years, ACNSS evolved from a coalition of residents banding together in opposition to a major pipeline development project to a legally-recognized, community-based, not-for-profit association aimed at promoting the conservation of nature on private lands. The transition has been arduous for the residents at times, and much more work is yet to be done. When the ongoing studies are completed, ACNSS will present the findings and recommendations to owners along the corridor and to the wider community. All the information that has been gathered through the studies will be made available to the municipality and the MRC, and information will be shared with other conservation groups. ACNSS is now involved in community events, such as the Spring Clean-up and community garage sales, through which it is gaining recognition as a community-based initiative. A website is in the works, an ACNSS logo, as well as brochures explaining the purpose and plans of the ACNSS and offering the opportunity for people to join it or make donations toward the conservation of nature in South Stukely.

Interpretations:

The role of the local community in decision-making

The story of the widening of the corridor to make room for the second pipeline and its impact on the South Stukely community includes the community's early resistance to much larger economic and political forces, its ultimate defeat in altering the outcomes of the decision-making process, and its subsequent search for community-based solutions to address the problems engendered by the development project. The evolution of this story matches a trend seen around the world in which government decisions are made in distant areas, with large-scale economic and political considerations in mind, and often with little real input or reference to the communities within which the impacts are felt.

The past two decades have seen many similar rural communities across Canada undergoing major transformations, be it forest communities eroding under the weight of mechanization and automation as well as global economic trade relations, or fishery communities transformed by the actions of large foreign-based extractive industries and their impact on the fish populations' reproductive capacity. What makes the South Stukely case somewhat

unique is that it was not a local sawmill that was shut down or a local fishery that closed indefinitely causing an economic downturn. In South Stukely, no jobs were lost, nor were any gained by the installation of the additional pipeline. Though some compensation money was offered to landowners, intended to offset the loss of use of the land above the buried pipeline, the one-time monetary value cannot be compared with the permanent change inflicted upon the landscape and the persistent ancillary impacts that continue to be felt years after construction. The South Stukely residents continue to pay the costs of giving up their private land against their will for the benefit of an amorphous entity made up of industry and government without clear evidence or understanding of how the benefits will be distributed. Since the natural gas pipeline was built solely to export to the United States, not one litre of natural gas was granted to the local community.

While these questions of distributive justice (i.e. issues of fairness in the distribution of costs and benefits) are important, the story of South Stukely described in the preceding pages focuses primarily on procedural justice, the issue of fairness in a democratic process. In democratic societies, government authority derives from the consent of the governed, and public participation is seen as both morally and functionally integral to the fundamental democratic values of political equality and legitimacy, along with accountability of government, and social responsibility among citizens (Renn *et al.*, 1995).

Two imperatives of governance have arisen in western democracies in recent years. The first is a matter of process. The public, in general, appears less and less content to let distant governments and private corporations make decisions that will inevitably impact their day-to-day lives without having some sort of input into those decisions. This trend is evidenced by the rise in number, diversity, and political strength of non-governmental organizations, community groups, and citizen activists, which have creatively voiced their interests on a host of social and environmental issues, including civil rights, whale hunting, nuclear energy, wilderness protection, abortion, euthanasia, free-trade, and genetic engineering. The public is demanding a more participatory role in the decisions that will affect their lives.

The second imperative relates to the substantive content of decisions made. One of the most dramatic shifts of the post-industrial period has been a heightened concern for environmental quality. Ever since the widespread adoption of the concept of

“sustainable development”⁶ as a centerpiece for a desirable future state, government decisions are expected to be compatible with this notion, whether they relate to the use of land and natural resources, the economy, or other areas of social policy. These new imperatives are interrelated and both are complex. Public participation is not only a democratic cornerstone, but it is often the basis for the public support that is necessary for sustainable development.

Not surprisingly then, it was with the rise in environmental consciousness in the late 1960s and early 1970s that public participation has come to the fore. The role of the public in environmental policy decisions has undergone a profound transformation over the past three decades, evolving from the enthusiasm for widespread emergence of public participation in the 1970s, through the effectiveness of lobbying activities in the 1980s, to the supremacy of environmental mediation, round table negotiations, and dispute resolution techniques in the 1990s.

However, greater public participation has not been a panacea for effective decision-making, and the progress is slow toward making public participation work. Acceptance of the value of public participation in decision-making is not universal in government or industry, despite stated commitments to incorporate public input into policies and to make sustainable decisions. Opening venues for the public to participate is therefore still resisted because exposure to public scrutiny often does not serve their interests (Hessing and Howlett, 1997). Governments and industrial proponents express concern over the potential for an intrusive and ill-informed public to block or transform a well-conceived resource development project. The traditional approach, termed the “decide-announce-defend” scenario of decision-making in which the public is confronted only after a course of action is determined (Connor, 1996), is often still the preferred approach. In this approach, the public participation activities are perceived as mere regulatory requirements (Beierle, 1998). Too often, public participation is “more a symbol of an expanded democracy, i.e. for optics, than for its real purpose of contributing to the decision-making process” (Ekos, 1995).

It is not unusual for observers, environmentalists and other interested parties from among the public to express concern that public input in development projects is nothing more than a public relations strategy to deflect opposition (Warriner, 1997). Rather than promoting genuine communication and strengthening relationships between government, industrial proponents and communities in

order to make sustainable environmental decisions, public participation becomes an exercise in frustration that increases the adversarial nature of decision-making. Evidence has been mounting for decades that citizens are becoming dissatisfied with the quality of participation in which they perceive themselves as having no meaningful part. As Gregory (2000, 11) states:

Too often decision-makers cast a wide net for hearing citizens' views but then disappear behind closed doors to interpret what they have heard and to work out tough conflicts that inevitably arise across disparate points of view. A charitable interpretation is that decision-makers' access to tools for deeply understanding the concerns of the community residents, technical experts, or interest groups and for incorporating objectives and tradeoffs effectively as part of policies or legislation has not kept pace with the rhetoric of public involvement. It is therefore not surprising that there remains a widespread dissatisfaction with the quality and meaningfulness of stakeholder input with the environmental decisions.

The experience of the South Stukely coalition of residents appears to confirm the pattern discovered elsewhere that opportunities for participation are not synonymous with meaningful public input, resulting in dissatisfaction with the government's public hearing process. Further, as Sinclair states (1997, 44), *"the opportunity to participate in an environmental assessment process cannot be equated with the ability to influence the decision-making process"*. In South Stukely, the impact of public hearings on the proponent and actual decision-making body is far from clear.

What is certain, though, is that neither the NEB nor the BAPE hearings were sufficient to adequately address the concerns of the majority of South Stukely residents. Rather, they appeared to put the South Stukely residents in an unprepared, adversarial position rather than seeking their best interests. The South Stukely coalition of residents felt "steamrolled" by a giant and powerful machine of government specialists intent on getting the pipeline in the ground by a pre-defined deadline.

Evidence to support this local perception of the hearings process is found in interview responses of the 2003 landowners' attitude study. The study revealed deep issues of distrust in the pipeline company, the National Energy Board and, to a lesser degree, the federal, provincial, municipal and regional governments. The majority of South Stukely residents felt the public hearings were merely one of the procedural obligations in the pipeline approval

process, rather than any genuine attempt to hear what the public actually had to say. Several complained about the paternalistic attitude taken by pipeline proponents, and public hearings' chairperson, to anybody with an alternative view about the possible environmental impacts of the proposal. One South Stukely resident stated the following:

I was standing like a criminal in front of the NEB [National Energy Board]. You have not done a thing and you have to defend yourself, you are the culprit. Before them, you really are the culprit. To them, we bring their business to a standstill."(respondent B)

It is important to note, in the South Stukely experience, that there appeared to be a parallel process going on "behind the scenes", as it were, while the public hearings were in session. The tactics of TQM land assessors who targeted the elderly, and absentee landowners, and otherwise vulnerable people of South Stukely by intimidating them into signing compensation agreements, betray a disdain for an equitable democratic process. The impact of TQM's compensation negotiations with this handful of strategically targeted landowners in South Stukely, although hidden from public view, appeared to be more significant on the final outcome than the weeks of formal, and very visible, public hearings. A fair democratic process would have forbidden any parallel negotiations to take place while the formal public hearings were in session. It is easy to understand why the South Stukely residents found these actions, and the entire decision-making process, to be morally reproachable.

The upshot, however, is that the South Stukely community is not giving up, to which this article also attests. The vision they have crafted for nature conservation, and the strategy they are developing, demonstrates a glimpse of the personality and character of the community. It has been stated that "*in order to regenerate our communities, we must deal with all of the related aspects of community breakdown*" (Nozick, 1999, 5). The new *Association de Conservation de la Nature de Stukely-Sud* was formed out of the ruins left by the installation of the second pipeline, and like a phoenix rising from the ashes, it is becoming a community-based, visionary force for local empowerment, nature conservation and appreciation of place. It is calling for more community control over local resources, becoming more ecologically sustainable, meeting the needs of local individuals in the community, and building a community culture. As such, it is ushering in a revival of a local sense of place while

promoting a new ecological perspective.

On a very practical level, ACNSS aims to heal the perceived scar on the landscape left by the second pipeline through conservation biology and sensitive management. Rather than focus on the negative and the defeat of the past, the new association is pressing forward to develop a shared vision of conservation that the wider community can participate in and take ownership of. South Stukely residents are redeveloping their capacity to affect their community's future by tapping into the common love of the natural setting in which they have chosen to live.

The South Stukely nature conservation project speaks of the value of biodiversity, which is to speak of the value of life in all its diversity. According to the vision, the plant and animals species that share their living space with the South Stukely residents also form part of the local community. Yet the South Stukely residents recognize that barely anything is known about these species other than what is immediately useful to them or perhaps worse, a nuisance to them. Therefore, the call for further research and better knowledge of ecological conditions is the first necessary step toward reviving the whole community of life in South Stukely.

South Stukely residents are in good company. The past few years have seen increased involvement by community (municipalities as well as various organizations and groups representing different interests and coalitions of interest in a community) in influencing and managing ecological and sociocultural change on a local scale (Bryant, 1999). People are the greatest agents of community change, and the orientations that characterize the transformation of particular communities reflect multiple interests and values of the people involved (Randolph, 2004). The challenge for ACNSS is to draw together these interests and values by drawing together people and offering them the opportunity to become involved in a common and shared vision of the need for nature conservation. This will be enabled by an understanding of the local biodiversity that is found on the residents' private lands – in their own backyards.

In several rural communities around the world, people are awakening to the fact that biodiversity exists despite their lack of knowledge of it, or the immediate utilitarian value any species or group of species may have, spurring them to advance new adaptive, community-based conservation initiatives (Meffe et al, 2002). This discovery is proving to be both humbling and cathartic. ACNSS, like many other community-based groups, has understood that local knowledge and local appreciation of environmental conditions is

very critical to a community's future. As Meredith (as cited in Pierce, 1999, 283) observes:

Given that each human being is attached to some specific local environment in the matrix, and that consciousness of sustainability resides only at the level of the individual, concerns about degrees of satisfaction with, and motivation for, progress toward sustainability will be rooted in the local.

If this is true, then only the South Stukely residents will be able to determine the future of their nature conservation project, and ultimately, the future of their community.

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NOTES

1. The National Energy Board is the regulatory authority over the energy industry in Canada. It was also one of the proponents in the TQM pipeline construction project through the Eastern Townships.
2. Interestingly, a large condominium development project around Mount Orford Park is currently being proposed.
3. NIMBY is an acronym for Not-In-My-Backyard. Media coverage generally favoured TQM and the National Energy Board's position. Only one newspaper which extensively covered the hearings, the *Sherbrooke Record*, was perhaps the most sympathetic to the South Stukely landowners.
4. An engineer from the construction company contracted to the build the pipeline accused a local resident, who opposed the proposed route, of causing the bankruptcy of his firm.
5. The corridor in South Stukely provides edge habitat between the forest and the fields, and as such provides access both to forest and open habitats, the dual habitat that many animals and birds depend on. If the sharp edges could be blurred, with the planting of shrubs for example, the forest transition might be more suitable for wildlife habitat while less susceptible to wind damage and intrusions by trespassers.
6. The concept "*Sustainable Development*" was popularized in the report *Our Common Future* prepared by the World Commission on Environment and Development (1987). It defined the concept as: "Development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs".